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The Rhode Island Waterways and Their Outlet

Paper Read by

HON. A. J. POTHIER

Governor of Rhode Island

AT THE SECOND ANNUAL CONVENTION

of the

ATLANTIC DEEPER WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION
NORFOLK, VA.

November 18, 1909

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THIRD ANNUAL CONVENTION
PROVIDENCE, R. I.

August 31, September 1, 2, 3, 1910

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THE RHODE ISLAND WATERWAYS AND THEIR OUTLET

Paper read by Hon. A. J. Pothier, Governor of Rhode Island, before
the Atlantic Deeper Waterways Association, Norfolk, Va.,
November 18, 1909

GOVERNOR POTHIER: Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: I have the honor to-day to represent a State deeply concerned and interested in this question of inland waterways. The larger the commercial industries interested in this Association the more important becomes the problem which is being considered here to-day, especially so for those States of New England bordering on the Atlantic Ocean, dependent as they are on the products of the South for their industries, for their manufactories. Easier transportation, cheaper transportation for New England is a necessity to-day, if New England is going to retain her supremacy, and we all know that she will. It is with pleasure, my friends, that I come here to-day representing one of those New England States, Rhode Island, the State that you know for its industries and for its great progressiveness. In dealing with the subject, "The Waterways of Rhode Island and Their Outlet," it is my purpose to direct the attention of this convention and of the commercial interests along the Atlantic coast to the vital importance which the proposed waterway links between Massachusetts Bay and Long Island Sound, connecting Boston with New York, bear to the whole project for safe water transportation from Maine to Florida.

The contour of the coast-line of southeastern New England forms a long peninsula, extending 100 miles easterly into the Atlantic Ocean. At its extremity is Cape Cod. At either end

of the base line, on the headwaters of Narragansett Bay and Massachusetts Bay, respectively, are the cities of Providence and Boston, forty-five miles apart. Each of these cities is a center of manufacturing and industrial activity surpassed by few if any territorial areas of equal extent on this continent.

The immense traffic between these centers and the ports to the southward on the Atlantic seaboard is hampered by the fact that this peninsula, skirted by the islands of Block Island, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, with the Nantucket and Monomoy Shoals, forms one of the most dangerous areas for navigation on the entire eastern coast of the United States.

The use of the treacherous passageway thus described, by vessels of all classes, is exceeded by few localities in the world. The entire water-borne commerce between the South and points in northern New England and the British provinces, which passes through these waters, amounts to 20,000,000 tons of freight annually, and the traffic along these shores and shoals is attended with an appalling loss of life and property.

Between the eastern end of Long Island and Provincetown, which is at the extreme end of Cape Cod, upwards of 1,000 disasters were recorded during the years from 1880 to 1903, and there were doubtless many more of which no record is available. Fully 35 per cent. of these disasters took place on Block Island and along the southern shore of Rhode Island.

Only last week, on November 8th, a collision between the schooner "Merrill C. Hart" and the barkentine "John S. Bennett" off Point Judith, resulted in the loss of both vessels and eleven of the thirteen men comprising their crews.

To the eastward, near Cuttyhunk Island, is the wreck of the schooner "Charles J. Willard," and on the Monomoy Shoals, at the eastern entrance to Nantucket Sound, lie the wrecked barges "West Virginia" and "Shenandoah," all destroyed within the past thirty days, representing a financial loss of \$75,000.

The remedy proposed for all this is the inland waterway upon which a Government survey is now in progress. The route for which the people of Rhode Island are contending,

contemplates a canal from Boston to the sheltered waters of Mount Hope and Narragansett Bays, or approximately along the line of the base of the Cape Cod peninsula, cutting off the dangerous passage from Boston around Cape Cod and through Nantucket Sound; thence from Narragansett Bay, through its western shore line, across Rhode Island to the eastern end of Long Island Sound, thus avoiding the passage around Point Judith and the exposed south shore of Rhode Island.

Narragansett Bay, with its tributaries, already pierces the Cape Cod peninsula at its western end half way to Boston. Of the 31 miles of proposed waterway on the other side of the bay across Rhode Island to Watch Hill, 24 miles are already covered by tide water.

Rhode Island, not only for herself but in the interest of the eastern portion of Massachusetts and of that great industrial zone which by nature is tributary to Narragansett Bay, has proposed, and will use every honorable means to promote, the construction of the Rhode Island link in this great chain of waterways, and will lend every possible aid in securing the adoption of a layout through eastern Massachusetts that will join the waters of Narragansett Bay with those of Boston harbor.

Only in this manner can Boston and Beaufort, North Carolina be joined by an inland waterway in fact. By this layout the entire route is protected, with not one mile of actual ocean navigation for the whole distance.

This feature commends the route which Rhode Island is advocating in preference to the original suggestion for a protected waterway from Beaufort to the eastern end of Long Island Sound only. From that point the first plan was to follow the stretch of 60 miles of dangerous ocean navigation along the southeast coast of New England to the mouth of Buzzards Bay; thence through the Cape Cod Canal into Cape Cod Bay, with another stretch of open navigation from there to Boston harbor.

Such a plan as this would defeat absolutely the fundamental

idea of the inland waterway which is the basis of this Association.

The 31-mile link through Rhode Island from the village of Hamilton, on the westerly shore of Narragansett Bay, to Watch Hill, would be perhaps the least costly of any of those now proposed, and would confer as distinct a benefit upon commerce and afford as urgently needed relief as any link in the entire project.

To realize this fact it is only necessary to invite your attention to the wonderful industrial development of the entire section of territory bordering on the head waters of Narragansett Bay, with the city of Providence as its center—a city well situated as a distributing point for the supplies needed for Rhode Island and eastern Massachusetts.

In Rhode Island alone, during the year 1900, there was used \$96,292,661 worth of raw material, from which products worth \$184,074,378 were manufactured. All this raw material was brought into Rhode Island from every section of the country, and the product was shipped in return to practically every State in the Union. We produce but little from the soil of Rhode Island that enters into our manufactures, but the inventive genius of our industrial classes, the intellect and enterprise of our citizens in gathering in the natural products of other sections and converting them into articles of utility, is the basis of our extensive industrial development.

In bringing in our raw material and shipping our product it is seen that we are doubly dependent upon the element of transportation. Narragansett Bay is so situated that not only is it most favorably adapted to the commercial interests around Providence but also those of the entire inland zone covering all of eastern Massachusetts, offering as it does open communication to the south without the dreaded passage around Cape Cod.

And the dangers on the southern coast of Rhode Island are second only to those of the Cape. The stretch of ocean from Long Island Sound to Point Judith and the entrance to the bay, covers a distance sufficient to require from ten to

fifteen hours for passage with a tow of barges—long enough for such changes in weather conditions to take place as have resulted disastrously to shipping on many occasions.

This great water highway is, in a measure, congested by reason of vessels being compelled, especially in thick weather, to keep closely to a prescribed course in order to make the turning points marked by buoys and lightships; a condition that adds greatly to the element of danger.

The number of vessels passing Point Judith during the daylight hours of 1908 was 19,791, and it is estimated that 50 per cent. additional passed during the night time, a total of nearly 29,000, representing an estimated registered tonnage of 50,-650,000 tons.

This ocean trip of 35 miles from the eastern end of Long Island Sound to Narragansett Bay, is thus a handicap to the commerce of this entire section of New England. It is especially dangerous for the class of cheap barges suitable for the inland carriage of bulky freight. It is not an infrequent occurrence that tows of barges are detained from two to three weeks at New London, awaiting suitable weather to come around into Narragansett Bay.

The freight rates on coal from New York terminals and from Philadelphia vary considerably with the demand. For the years 1906, 1907 and 1908 they averaged from New York 40 cents, 50 cents, and 40 to 45 cents per ton respectively, alongside at Providence. From Philadelphia, they averaged for the same years 66 cents, 93 cents, and 68 cents. It is said that there is a small margin of profit in the carrying of coal from New York at 40 cents per ton.

In contrast to this is the rate on cotton, which we import in great quantities from the South, of ten cents per hundred pounds or \$2.00 per ton from New York, under its rating as fourth-class freight; while first-class freight is about 20 cents per hundred pounds, or \$4.00 per ton by water, and slightly more by rail.

With suitable waterways and barges adapted to the traffic there appears to be no good reason why the freight on cotton

should not at least be cut in two from the points of production. It is with a view to rendering possible a vast improvement in the facilities for transportation that the people of Rhode Island heartily indorse the Atlantic coast inland waterway, and especially urge that link which, passing through an almost natural route in the Southern part of the State, connects the protected waters of Long Island Sound with those of Narragansett Bay.

The detail survey of this link by the United States engineers, under the appropriation made for the purpose by the 60th Congress, is now nearing completion. The route contemplates a sea-level canal, probably not less than 16 feet deep and possibly 25 feet, and of sufficient width for the passing of the largest vessels that can use it. Even with a depth of but 16 feet the more urgent necessities would be relieved, for with the ability to employ an inexpensive type of boat, and with the delays and dangers now incident to the ocean route eliminated, a saving of ten to fifteen cents a ton can undoubtedly be made on coal freights, and a reduction of at least one-half will be possible on many other commodities.

Not only will the benefit of such redtiction be realized by Rhode Island manufacturers, but the undertaking has a bearing of the greatest importance upon the transportation problem for the whole New England coast section. Gentlemen, I thank you. (Great applause).

Atlantic Deeper Waterways Association

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The Monthly Bulletins and other papers and data pertaining to the proposed inland waterways now being surveyed from

NEW ENGLAND TO FLORIDA

will be sent regularly to all municipalities, corporations, firms and individuals who have attached themselves as members; and at the Norfolk Convention which President Taft attended, more than 800 new members were guaranteed.

The next Convention of the Association is to be held at Providence, R. I., August 31, September 1, 2 3, 1910, when it is hoped the membership will be doubled.

Every business man, every agriculturalist, every manufacturer, every shipper, every land-owner, every engineer, every sailing-master, every ship-owner, every yachtsman, every motor-boat builder, owner or operator should connect himself with this important movement.

Individual membership, \$5 per annum; firms or corporations, \$10; trade organizations, \$15 to \$75, according to membership; waterway associations, \$75; municipalities of 5000 or less, \$50; over 5000, \$100.

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